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# The Quest of childhood memory

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# **The Quest of Childhood Memory**

By

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A Thesis Submitted  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Fine Arts  
in  
Fine Arts Studio Painting

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## **Abstract**

An articulation of my experience is found in my artworks. The works are confessional because their themes are based on my autobiographical traces. Each piece of artwork represents a personal situational narrative in itself. The creation of life size underwear and outfits in plastic - the whimsical, transparent, and glittery images of cutout silhouettes depict hidden desire as well as nostalgia. Because dresses possess distinctive nuances such as activeness, fantasy, and intimacy, I will research a variety of styles along with different poses and gestures to explore their expressions.

By interpretation and analysis of the object – the artwork produced, I will first attempt to reveal the difficulties of exposing our desires and passions in society due to preconceptions others have about us. My cutouts of objects represent various emotions such as eagerness, expectation, anxiety as well as solitude of isolation. Through the creation of an environment, a playground-like space where audiences discover the link of forgotten memories within the context of the artwork, every single piece is to be hung from the ceiling of the gallery as an installation so that audiences are able to interact within them in a playful atmosphere.

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## **Prologue**

When I was five, my family moved to Tokyo from Seoul, Korea due to my father's transfer in his company. That was my first encounter with a different culture as a foreigner. My journey continued since then from Tokyo to Seoul, Hong Kong, and then back to Seoul. I am currently located in the United States - by myself this time. Such traveling and transition in my earlier days has always been significant to me. Constant conflict among different cultures has become the main issue and concern that triggered my passion towards art. Early experiences in a variety of cultures taught me to recognize preconceptions inherent in all cultures. From childhood to emotional puberty, such preconceptions led me to endless questions and anger towards society within mixed cultures.

Children dream of their own utopias through reading and seeing picture books of fairy tales and playing with toys. I attempt to reconcile my memory of a conflict by creating an imaginative utopia, which is a playful and humorous plastic doll-like environment. There was an unreachable distance from the world I lived in to the world of fairytales perceived as a child. Consequently, I became more aware of the importance of my inner world. Searching for my childhood memories was then an ultimate choice in presenting my inner world. These memories, deeply rooted in this psychological state of mind, enabled me to unfold my own narrative.



*Love with Shakespeare, 2004*

Acrylics, Glass paints, Fabrics, Feathers, Stones on Plastic, 24" x 21"

## **Introduction**

The experience of learning foreign languages from diverse cultures during my childhood has given me an acute sensitivity to communication and, therefore influenced my artistic expression in a profound way. All my work is marked by a great concern for language, time, memory, and especially communication with viewers.

My experiences/memories are articulated in my artworks. They are confessional because their themes are autobiographical. Every one of my memories has a selective image. Being of Asian descent and having been immersed in western culture, it was inevitable for me to want to escape to the ideal of western beauty and style. I extended the concept of paper doll play that girls are familiar with. While the hidden desire for beauty is often repressed in today's society, it is my intent to evoke that notion in life size outfits and objects that are mischievously juxtaposed.

Through my artwork, I intend to convey my response. My message is to share with the viewer optimistic and humorous memories from childhood, which one may have experienced and forgotten. In a playful doll-like environment, viewers are invited to interact with each object by simply standing behind the work I created. Each piece represents mixed styles of fashion in order to augment the confusion of childlike taste. Also, the unconscious hybridity of culture is depicted. By playing with these unfitted cutouts of clothing, viewers experience distinctive nuances such as activity, explicitness, and intimacy as well as nostalgia. A journey to my own childhood memory was inevitable. This is where and how I started collecting my inspirations, which eventually became the theme of the work. The Quest of Childhood Memory has just begun.

## Images of Everyday Remnants in Earlier Days 1



*The Princesses from Vintage Book*

Like other ordinary girls, I grew up with the world of Disney. It was my first encounter of the western world of beauty and fashion. I recall that I was rather more - fascinated by the princesses' attires than the stories, and I dreamed that I could someday wear those dresses. Even though I was aware that all the beautiful princesses were from the West, I did not give up believing that I could become one of those beauties by wearing their dresses.



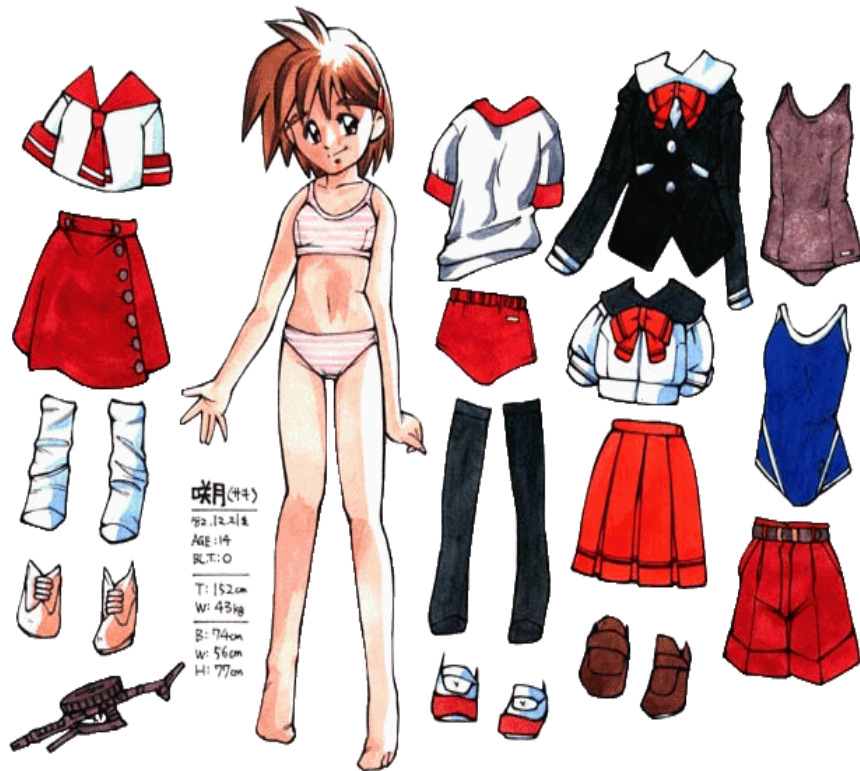
## Images of Everyday Remnants in Earlier Days 2



### *The Favorite Old Illustrated Books of Mine*

During my period in Japan, I played with various kinds of illustrated books. Thanks to the flourishing Japanese Manga (Comics) and Anime (Animation Films) industry, I was simply fascinated by the Western and Asian fusion style of illustration and images.

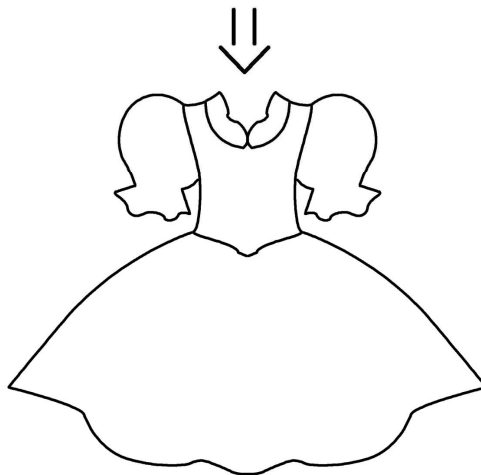
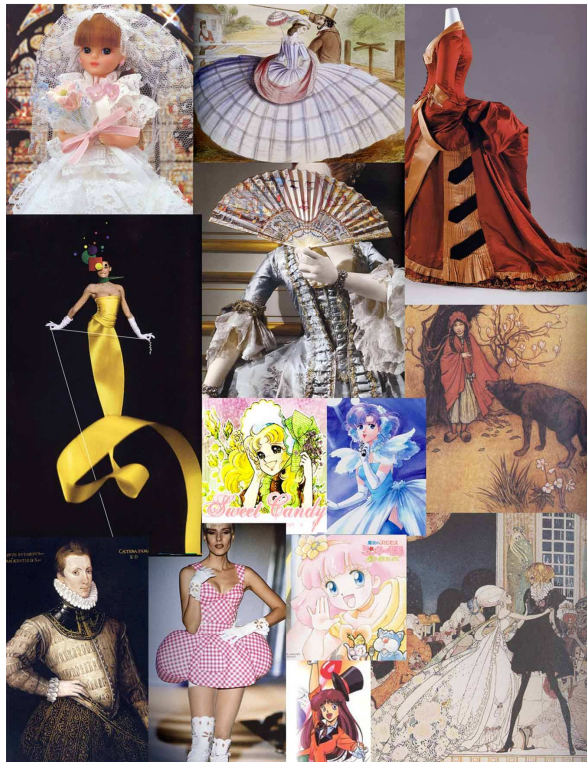
### Images of Everyday Remnants in Earlier Days 3



## *The Inspiration of Paper Doll*

Paper dolls were one of the most common toys that I played with when I was a child. Not only the idea of switching paper clothes was fascinating, but also the idea of transforming identity by changing the costumes was attractive. I could transform into any character I wished to become while I was playing with the dolls. My friends and I used to dress up our dolls to look like the well known princesses of Grimm Fairy Tales and magical fairies of Japanese animation and comic books. This is when our desires and dreams were realized and this is where we, the little children, had power to create our dream world.

## Image of Mindscape



*The Box of Treasures = My Imagination / Inspiration*

I used to collect all sorts of images of my favorite fairy tales and Manga, and animations, even from what I saw in my dreams. Fashion magazines of my mother's, which introduced me to a slight outlet to the real world, were also part of my collection. The collection piled up along with my sketches and doodling as I was busy reviving all

kinds of beautiful characters from the collection. The revived characters were reborn with new attires, new accessories, and new group of friends in another kingdom of mine. I had the power and I was the creator in the kingdom. As a child, the activity was purely for my own entertainment. The collection and the activity were such great sources for my inspiration that it provided me the foundation of my own creation. Those images were important sources for my roots of inspiration. Thus, the collection was named the Box of Treasures.

The initial stage of embarking in the paper doll project came as soon as I had opened my latest Box of Treasures. From the old fairy tales through modern Manga, animation, and fashion photography, I discovered my various childhood memories, which were very personal and deeply connected to my childhood dream and desire.

There was a colorless paper doll dress dangling in the air, but the style was ambiguous because I saw neither pattern nor embellishment on the dress. I wanted to revive the dress with colors and styles as if I added colors to lines in coloring book. A fine panorama of the images from the Box of the Treasures spread out in front of me. All I needed to do was to pick images from it and then create my own dress.

The images of my old favorite fairy tales opened out in the beginning of the process. I drew all different kinds of princesses' dresses I would like to wear from my collection. Rococo style was mostly selected as I had always been drawn to its highly decorative style. Numerous Japanese versions of fairy tale illustrations I kept employed Rococo designs. The ornate decorations such as balloon-like skirt with puff sleeves, exquisitely patterned fabric, and lace have been the symbols of fairy beauty for me.

Moreover, the images from my favorite characters from Manga, animations and some of the collection of fashion designers as well added up to make the image sketches for my dresses. My old time favorite characters of Manga and animations were the ordinary girls who happened to acquire magic wands from fairy gods. With the magic wands, the

girls were able to transform into whoever they wish to become. The unification of the fairy god and the ordinary girl represents the blended concept of fairy tales and modern comics.

Most of the dresses I selected from the fashion designers resembled very much the taste of fairy tales and fantasy. Beautiful dresses worn by doll-like models definitely created an atmosphere of fantasy. Consequently dreaming of ideal Western style beauty had grown in me ever since I was exposed to Western cultures. The protagonists of most of the fairy tales I read were of course from the West. They were usually described as fair skinned blond beauties with blue eyes. The images from the fashion magazines I gathered seemed to have augmented the desire of such beauty that grew in my mind. Throughout collecting, sketching and playing with paper dolls, I expressed my desire for Western beauty without much notice. By decorating paper dolls or any kind of dolls with my favorite dresses, I felt like my dream was fulfilled.

## The Paper Doll Project

Upon beginning the paper doll project, I was deeply affected by Arthur Schlesinger's statement:

"The classical tales have populated the common imagination of the West. They are voyages of discovery. They introduce children to the existential mysteries-the anxiety of loneliness, the terror of rejection, the need for comradeship, the quest for fulfillment, the struggle against fate, victory, love, and death."<sup>1</sup>

His statement aroused me to think how the project led me to the deeper meaning of my self-discovery. Aside from the pure visual entertainment for myself, I intended to search for fragments of childhood memories that led me to initiate the paper doll project. While I was fascinated by the abundant collection of Western styles of beauty, I also experienced the joy of sharing it with my friends. The beauty must have been acknowledged by others or else it would have been meaningless. Children including myself of course were aware of this fact. Playing with paper dolls was quite an ideal way for me to share my ideas and even share my feelings with friends when I was a child. The activity not only meant playing for fun but also stimulated communication with others. I recalled how I learned to invite friends to play with me whenever I moved to new locations. Introducing all kinds of my toys to a new group of people became a tool for me to break the ice. "Welcome to my castle!" I said to my friends and from that very moment, the words prompted us to play around with full excitement. There was no longer awkward silence

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. *A Life in the Twentieth Century*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000



among us. The experience thus built the foundation and later inspired the motif of the paper doll project.

The project started off with devotion to the beauty of the old style paper doll book. Experimenting with materials was an important part in the beginning. The quality of exquisiteness, lightness, and cleanness were essential because I wanted to bring out familiar elements of the paper doll. After a number of experiments, I chose a clear plastic as the major material for the project. Plastic is flexible, and most importantly I could cut it by using scissors. The process of the cutting is a craftsman-like activity. It demonstrates an attraction to details and subjects.



*Balloons*, 2003, Glass Paints on Plastic, 12"x 17"

*Flower Bouquet*, Glass Paints on Plastic, 15"

Unlike regular paper, plastic could be manipulated from both sides. The mixture of both two and three dimensions in plastic represents the duality of my mixed culture. Glass paints were used as they have the most clean and clear effect, so the back side of the completed objects looked almost the same as the front side. Due to the variety of bright color selections, I was able to achieve the nuance of the paper doll dress by playing with the colors during the process.

In order to better utilize the new materials, I started creating small objects such as the balloons and the flower bouquets before producing life size dresses. Then, I carefully moved on to making underwear as I planned to follow the sequence of the old style paper doll book. After creating a series of underwear and lingerie, I immediately decided to install them by hanging them from the ceiling. Then I photographed them with models. Achieving an illusionary effect was the main goal at that stage, and the result was satisfactory.



*Underwear*, 2003, Glass Paints on Plastic, 12"x 9"





*Underwear, 2003, Glass Paints and Mixed Media on Plastic, 12"x 22"*

Naturally, the next step continued with the creation of life size dresses. I attempted to experiment with materials again by using various media such as feathers, fabrics, colored stones, etc. In the Feather Dress, I incorporated red feathers on the dress and the hat. Mixed media applied to the two dimensional plastic surface augmented the illusionary effect of three dimensions. While applying the feathers on the surface of the dress, I painted the stained glass patterns on the dress as if there was a mysterious stained glass window sewn on the dress.

After I completed the Feather Dress, I contemplated more about collaboration with models for the final stage of the project. Because it was crucial for me to direct the photography as a result of the project, I needed to figure out which model to wear which dress. Initially, I planned to model them myself throughout the entire project, but soon I

realized that the whole concept of the project was inviting friends to my fantasy land. I had decided to collaborate with models who were willing to participate in the project. Recruiting Asian friends was the priority since I proposed previously that I wanted to express the little Asian girl's desire, including mine, for Western styled decoration. I purposely requested the models not to wear make-up. They did not necessarily need to look attractive but rather I wanted them to look as natural as possible. The contrast between the Asian characters and the Western styled attires is meant to be humorous. These were displayed in an atmosphere in which the models were to play with the artworks.



*Feather Dress, 2003, Glass Paints and Mixed Media on Plastic, 19"x 41"*

French Doll Dress represents my utmost love toward the Rococo styled dress. I used acrylics, colored stones, and fabrics along with glass paints. The combination of the

media resonated with a dreamy like ambience, and it was the most popular dress of the entire collection. The highly decorative embellishment and the balloon shaped skirt seemed to have reached the destination I had been searching for. By the time I set to work on the French Doll Dress, I changed the plastic from a thinner version to a thicker version. The thicker version was still manageable to be cut by scissors but it was more rigid and it had better stability while suspending it from the ceiling.



*French Doll Dress, 2003, Glass Paints and Mixed Media on Plastic, 18"x 46"*



Adjusting to the use of the thicker plastics, I paid more attention to the posture of the dresses. In order to present more choices for the viewers in the end, it was important to try out various poses of dresses. In Flower Girl Dress for instance, the dress is composed of the bouquet and the dress itself. The design of the dress allows a model to freely move her arms. By setting the bouquet above the dress, it suggests a certain posture in advance.



*Flower Girl Dress*, 2004, Glass Paints and Mixed Media on Plastic, 17"x 43"



*Wing Dress*, 2004, Glass Paints and Mixed Media on Plastic, 19"x 38"

The Wing Dress was another experimental piece that I purposefully designed to attempt a different posture. Being sleeveless, knee-high length and having a slightly twisted waist, the dress allowed more freedom for a model to pose. As a result, the model easily imitated poses like a fashion model without hesitation.

I gained confidence after producing a number of paper doll pieces, and the learning of the process fueled me to a new challenge. My ultimate goal was to create a playground environment filled with doll dresses so that viewers could interact with them. The panoramic view of the old style paper doll book was about to be realized life size.



*Playground #1, 2004, Glass Paints and Mixed Media on Plastic*

In the series called Playground, I created a group of dresses that match their colors and styles well. When the combination of the dresses and the accessories was installed, I felt a sense of nostalgia as if I spread out pieces of my old paper doll dresses.

“In one way or another, every one of us has been shaped by the stories we have read and absorbed in the past. All stories, including fairy tales, present elemental truths, which can sometimes permeate your inner life and become part of you.”<sup>2</sup> I strongly agreed with Adeline Yen Mah’s statement. Growing up within mixed cultures definitely enabled me to encounter diverse foreign illustrations and books. Those absorbed images from the books

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<sup>2</sup> Adeline Yen Mah. *Chinese Cinderella: The True Story of an Unwanted Daughter*. New York: Random House, Laurel-Leaf, 1999

and toys were dormant in me, and I was not surprised to pull those images out of me when I first started the paper doll project. The images and the stories were part of me. Yearning for my age of innocence always existed in my mind, and it grew stronger when I relocated in a new place. The constant feeling of isolation, tension, and loneliness in the strange environment had to be overcome. Freud saw the human mind or psyche as consisting of three elements, the ego, the super-ego, and the id. The id is the instinctive drives. Freud called it “the pleasure principle,” because our instincts always aim at pleasure. I was no exception. The condensation of decorative, girlish and dream-like images played a great part in the healing process for me as it brought me back the reminiscences of childhood.



*Playground #2*, 2004, Glass Paints and Mixed Media on Plastic



It provided me the pleasure that I longed for for a while. The more dresses I created the more pleasure I received during the process of making paper doll dresses. Jane Yolen appreciated the strength and preciousness of the old tales: “There are many layers inside the old tales, like nesting Matrushka dolls. Examining the layers does not wreck the story, but shows how rich and fascinating they really are.”<sup>3</sup>

The method of involving people’s reaction into my project reflected what I desired to achieve through the project. Revealing the fragments of admiration, influence, and entertainment within the dresses, I was willing to communicate with viewers about what is in our inner world. Whether we are young or old, the subject presented in my “*Playground*” is universal: the childhood dream. Then, I recalled: “Storytelling can act as a social binding agent-like the egg yolk which, mixed up with the different coloured powders, produces colours of a painting.”<sup>4</sup> I believe interactions between viewers certainly blossomed into the true beauty, which might have been hidden behind the dress.

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<sup>3</sup> Jane Yolen. *Killing the Other. In Touch Magic: Fantasy, Faerie & Folklore in Literature of Childhood*, Little Rock, Ark.: August House Publishers, 2002. Pp. 105-

<sup>4</sup> Marina Warner. *The Breast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994



## Image Movement Sound Festival 2004



I participated in the annual mixed media event, Image Movement Sound Festival 2004. There I had an opportunity to collaborate with two other faculty members, Juanita Suarez (SUNY Brockport) and W. Michelle Harris (RIT). They both taught me valuable lessons that helped me develop my work in different ways. I was also able to collaborate and engage with people in non-visual art areas through the process.

Based on childhood memories, the work was a folktale about lost identity and the journey one must take to regain it. The group integrated their creative voices within the text of *My Dress Hangs There* and so a little piece of them could be found “hanging” there.

*My Dress Hangs There* was a vocal, dance performance done within a fabric (dress) installation that I created. Based on the childhood images of what it meant to be a member of one culture within a strange culture, this performance attempted to portray the dissonance that came from being a stranger in a strange land. The score was based on an original song created by Juanita Suarez.

The concept of the performance was chosen quite smoothly since the members shared a common experience. Juanita and Michelle grew up with their immigrant families in the US, and I am a foreign student from abroad. Because we were all from different majors; Juanita is both a dancer and a choreographer and Michelle has an Information Technology background, we had our own avenue to express the dialogue for the performance. Juanita prepared to dance and sing with the sculptures I created and Michelle designed lighting with her skill in interactive media.



During rehearsal, 2004, Paper, Lace and Wire, 22" x 24" x 54"

Confirmation in Roman Catholicism inspired me to create white dresses made of rice paper and lace. The three dresses embodied the abstract place where the transition from youth to adulthood developed, and the pure whiteness stressed this passage during the timeline of the performance. For all the delicate lightness and ethereality, the sculptures were an expression of past, present and future. The enlarged shapes of dresses allowed the dancer to freely interact along with her choreography. All three dresses also had small exit parts in their bodies, and these exits allowed the dancer to have various reactions to the sculptures.

Despite the limited time schedule, our group was able to successfully present the performance on stage. The progress of participating in the Image Movement Sound Festival provided me the opportunity to introduce my dresses in new materials and to show my work in a much larger space outside of a gallery. Ongoing communication with the members of the group indeed stimulated our thoughts, and I considered it as another valuable practice in helping me to develop my concepts with different dimensions in terms of materials, location, and with groups from other fields. We sometimes faced obstacles due to the given environment and to the evolving ideas we had. For instance, I was convinced to modify the original sketch of the sculptures due to the size of the auditorium and to the intense movement of the dancer. And the choreography and the lighting changed during a meeting when some new ideas came up. But, the members learned to adjust to this brainstorming whenever we met agreement. Above all, I gained encouragement to explore this new genre through the collaboration.



*Juanita Performing at the IMS Festival 2004; The performance was recorded and was shown at the Graduation Show 2004.*

## **The Art of Identity: Study of Artists**

All the artists that influenced this work are deeply rooted in their approach to different cultures and identity. It is crucial to identify the similarities among these artists. Through my research into these artists, I was able to learn how the artists discuss their stories with their own language and their own styles of art.

Yinka Shonibare who was born in London to Nigerian parents, caught my attention by his stylish, colorful dressed sculptures. Initially, I found similarity between his work and mine, and it was interesting for me to read how his cultural reference permeated the material he chose and how he presented his narrative through his work. The presentation of his final installation inspired the development of my installation with different objects.

Yayoi Kusama's obsessive and beautiful polka dotted work in various media gives so much pleasure. But I was more fascinated as soon as I learned about her ongoing struggle with mental illness. Her story behind the creativity was influential because I recalled how I attempted to overcome my loneliness through creation. Her work became more powerful to me when her passion towards art conquered her painful story.

Yasumasa Morimura disguises himself as famous Western female personalities challenging issues of gender, race, and identity. Although his theme is serious, the final presentation possesses grotesque humor, and I recognized this point of view as intriguing. Humor was the quality that I also sought from my work because I believed that humor had power to heal a wounded memory and then it brought back a pleasant aspect of the work.

Mariko Mori's ability to combine images of the East and the West provided an exotic and entertaining view. The alien character she created and transformed into with technological support stimulated me to broaden my imagination of the virtual world. The sophisticated method she used to create imaginary scenes connected to my thought of

creating a childhood memory world. I felt that the artist was ahead of me in her futuristic land while I was searching for my old memory.

Jean-Paul Goude's imaginative photography can not be separated from my memory of a fantasy land. His photography contains various narratives such as fairy tales and animations. Seeing his series of works was almost like viewing picture books. I grasped how I could visually play with my imagination.

## Yinka Shonibare

My first reaction to Shonibare's work was a pleasant surprise because I felt that his sculptures transformed into three dimensional form, my two dimensional paper dolls dresses. He has made a series of sculptural pieces using his trademark African textiles, Dutch Wax, which take the form of Victorian crinolines and bodices, and transforming these confining structures into bright, flamboyant sculptures. Many of his pieces have a highly crafted and decorative appearance. Some of the sculptures were displayed in theatrical ways. I was drawn to his works not only because of his meticulously fabricated colorful dresses but also his personal background. I found similarity between us in that we both spent our childhood as foreigners, and expressed our visual languages through dresses made in the materials that we chose in order to translate our cultures.

Because Shonibare mainly uses Dutch Wax to create dresses, the dresses possess such strong exotic nuance that I read each dress as the artist's collective memoir. It was interesting to learn how his sense of beauty was absorbed in his installations by incorporating his own cultural code like I chose plastic as a distinctive material to realize my cultural code. However, he displays headless mannequins in his Dutch Wax costumes whereas I anticipate the direct participation of the viewers. His sculpture offers a more explicit in a way to understand the narrative because he captures the moment of colonial events and situations. For example, his installation, *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation* is based on the artist's study of the Grand Tour, an 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century English aristocratic rite of passage, but according to the artist, the trip turned into a sexual liberation, and the two headless mannequins presented a sexually provocative scene. It clearly shows how Shonibare manifests the colonial period without being didactic, but suggesting it in colorful and playful ways. He depicted the pretense of the cultural education of the aristocrats through his visual environment. I was drawn to his method in which the mannequin in the attire he created

appears along with a theatrical narrative to deliver his message. This inspired me to expand my project by incorporating narratives which could possibly be my own story or someone else's.

The use of Shonibare's theatrical installations such as trees and swings that supports the dressed figures completes the whole story of the installation. I think using objects other than the mannequin's attire strongly effect the installation and I was influenced by this idea. I incorporated various objects which actually brought out different reactions within the installation. For instance, I installed a stool along with a dress which has a sitting posture so that viewers might get the idea, in advance, that they could sit to react with the installation.

According to Shonibare, his ideas come from memory and he does a lot of research. It was intriguing to find similar concepts from another artist from a different cultural background. The way he conceptualizes his work through translation of materials referring to his cultural context strengthened my belief in creating my own cultural context.



A detail from *Gallantry and Criminal Conversation*, 2002



## **Yayoi Kusama**

Her vibrant colors and patterns presented in numerous paintings, drawings, sculptures, and clothing lines are eye catching and enjoyable to look at. Even though she was suffering from mental illness, she cleverly visualized and transformed her illusion into beautiful art work. The polka dots, so called infinity nets, have been developed as her signature representation and they constantly appeared in her magnificent series of work. I regard her polka dots as her fantasy world and I see her using the pattern obsessively. The repetitive patterns seemed to echo her struggle with her illness and loneliness during her earlier residency in the US.

Kusama began to experience hallucinations that have plagued her throughout her life. Her mental illness is central to every aspect of her work, from her imagery to her working process. According to the artist, she would have been unable to survive if there was no art for her. Through creation, she escapes from her illness and hallucinations, and she calls it psychosomatic art. I was deeply influenced by how she managed to overcome her illness by making art although we do not share the same problem.

I believe that her vigorously active performances were primarily caused by her passion towards art. Ironically, the brightly hued organic forms of her sculptures and her infinity net paintings seem to be celebrating life's euphoric moment as opposed to her struggle with her illness. But I find the beauty of her work extremely inspiring. The power and the visual impact of Kusama's art world reminded me of how I arrived at the concept of the paper doll project. Turning my recollection of playing with paper dolls into artwork was not only a manifestation of the creator, but also the learning of a healing process for my desolated mind in foreign environments. Just like Kusama's obsessive, repetitive patterns constantly appear in her series of work, I discovered myself practicing my healing process through creating doll dresses with great devotion to craftsmanship.

The artist also started creating the Kusama Dress and textiles that were sold at department stores and boutiques all over the United States while she lived in the US. In 1969 she opened her own boutique. The dresses were mostly avant-garde designs with her signature polka dots prints. Despite her commercial failure in the fashion industry in the seventies, I still admire her courageous attempt to realize her fantasy and her dream in a foreign industry.



Yayoi Kusama with her work, 2008

## **Yasumasa Morimura**

I see Morimura as an entertainer, who makes art fun as if he is in the entertainment industry. There is an immediate response to his work, which is humor. By inserting himself in various famous Western characters, he discusses issues of gender, racial identity, and the uses of exoticism by the West and Hollywood by the East. “Will I still look beautiful if I make up myself as Marilyn Monroe?” That was quite a similar question to “Will I look like Cinderella if I wear her puff sleeved dress?” - my question as a child.

The way Morimura borrowed images from historical artists to famous Hollywood personalities and inserted his own face and body into them reminded me of my desire for transformation. Dealing with issues of cultural and sexual appropriation Morimura is constantly exploring ideas of image consumption, identity and desire. In his photographs, Morimura lives out his impossible dreams of being 'other', playing the role of Asian man infiltrating well known Western women just like how I utilized my paper doll dresses by playing with them.

The quality of grotesqueness of his portraits provides humor and fun, yet it conveys a feeling of loneliness and lost desire. I found a connection between Morimura's method and my yearning towards fantasy. In spite of the humor seen in his work, I was able to share the feeling that we dream of being part of the fantasized world. His effort to resemble those recognizable female personalities showed his desperate passion for impossible territory. It was fascinating to observe the extravagant transformation especially when the artist challenged the gender differences. The mask he creates with layers of heavy make-up depicts an equivalent to the volume of my balloon shaped Rococo styled doll dress.

Through his disguise with reconstructing the character, I perceived the inner dialogue of each character he recreated as I revived my old paper doll dresses from my recollection.

Morimura's simulated photographs showed me another possible dimension for transforming one's identity.



*Self-Portrait/After Marilyn, 1996*

## **Mariko Mori**

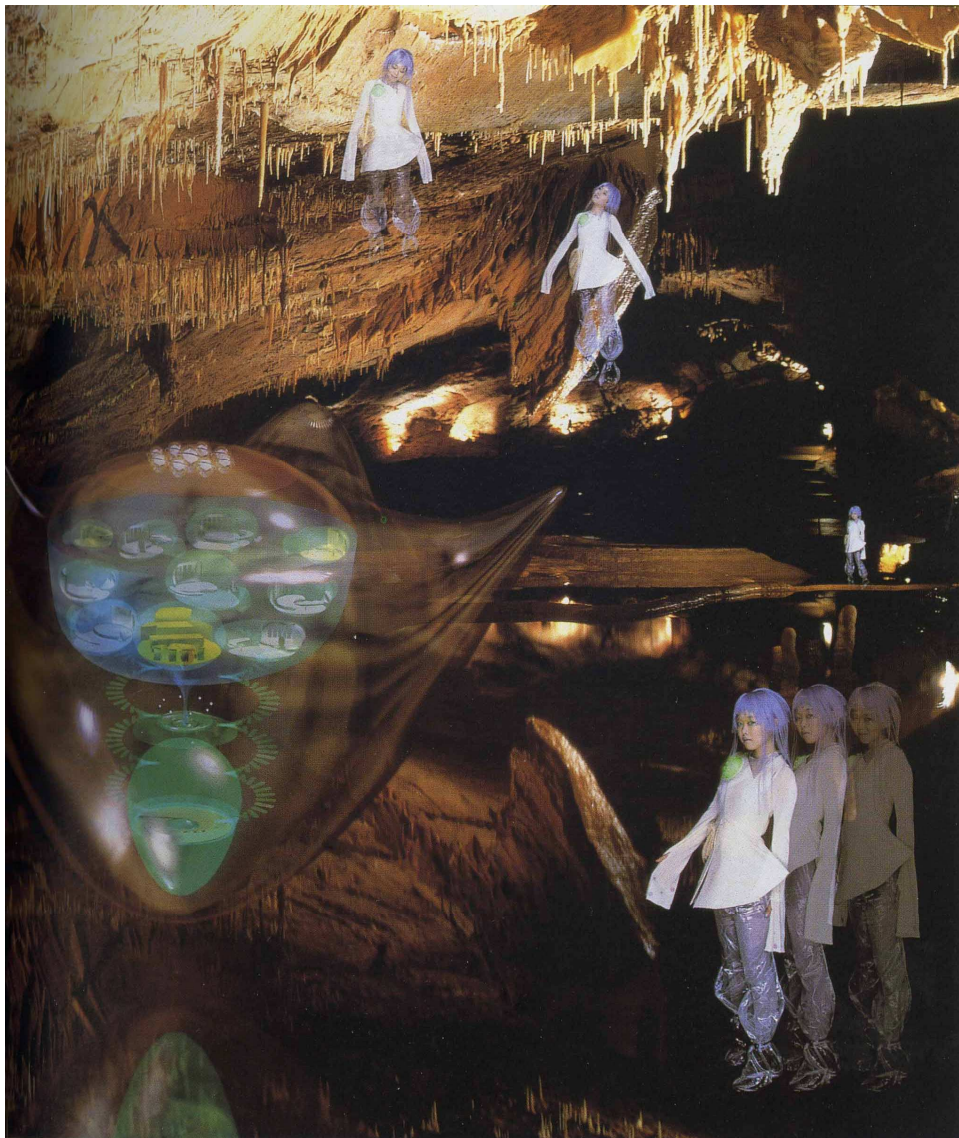
Mariko Mori started out in the fashion world as both a designer and a model. For Mori, fashion represents the primary site for the search of an aesthetic expression that develops its own context.

Mori's idea of creating her own style of a futuristic identity does not belong to a unified culture. She rather suggests universal and diversified cultural environments by using religious symbols and mundane locations in an artificially created environment. Mori constantly uses herself as a protagonist in her photographs and in videos, where she is almost regarded as a star or a goddess. The juxtaposition of Eastern mythology with the Western culture is a common theme in Mori's work, and her digital photography successfully beautifies the new creation of her identity. Although she does not necessarily discuss visual beauty in her work, her alien image is layered with strange exotic nuance. Perhaps the familiarity of Manga and films allowed me to appreciate the beauty of her work. I consider it her way of articulating her own fantasy land.

Focusing on the imagination and fantasy, Mori explores the notion of native cultures and universal consciousness in relation to nature. She suggests that in the last century technology became separated from utopia enabling science and technology to advance without any acknowledgement of the destruction of nature. Incorporating technology, she created a virtual world that does not exist anywhere. The artist sees an advance of technology as a tool for evolution, as in ancient civilizations and she believes that technology can put us back in touch with nature.

Her method of transforming herself into alien beings to play the role of a messenger who delivers such messages was simply intriguing. With friendly and peaceful looking characters strangely placed within a plastic environment, I recognized her work as a remedy to heal the wounded mind of the world. In relation to the concept of the remedy I created in

the world of my fantasy, I discovered that this artist and I acquired similar influences from both Eastern and Western cultures. Also Mori's work is visually entertaining, which strengthens the work beyond her peaceful message. It was amusing for me to learn how appropriately the artist blended imaginary scenery of both the East and the West and represented it as in a peaceful yet exotic atmosphere.



*Mirror of Water, 1998*



## Jean-Paul Goude

Jean-Paul Goude, best known as the man who "created" Grace Jones, has been one of the greatest contemporary imaginations and seminal taste makers since the 1970's.

In 1978, before the advent of Photoshop, manipulating images meant grappling with blades, paste and paint. Goude's artistry implemented these old-techniques to make his name. He went on to direct music videos and glamorous advertisements for Chanel. And while his penchant for illusion may have become de rigueur nowadays, his flair for theatrical femininity is still his own.



*Grace revised and updated, 1978*

*Linda Evangelista for Karl Lagerfeld, 2000*

Goude's work means a pure land of imagination and fantasy incorporated with the world of fashion. The way he created his production sets and the way he directed his models in his photography are extraordinarily beautiful and that fulfills my desire for exotic beauty that I can never gain.

Many of his ideas are deeply rooted in fairy tales and animations, thus his photographic sets are inspirational and reminiscent for me, even though they are created for commercial purpose.

I recall how I was influenced by the glamorous models in the magazines and how I grew up with the images of Western fashion and Western beauty. The way he emphasized his own styles of photography led me to broaden my imagination with the images I collected. Because the artist was able to extract the pure essence of beauty from the model and the object he aimed at, I learned how I could develop my work in photography.



## Images from the Graduation Show



Installation View, *Playground*, 2004

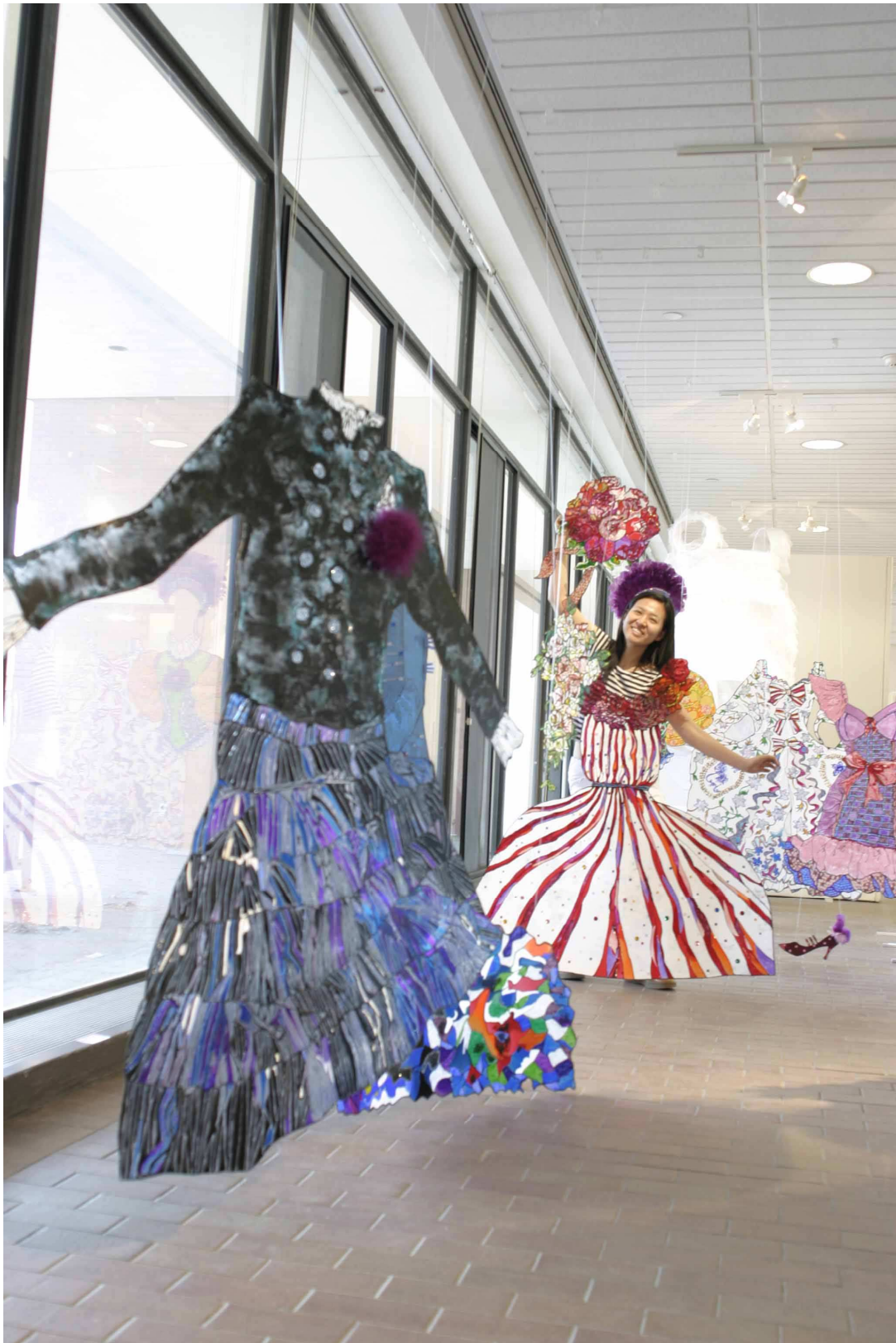
It was my intention to realize the concept of a playground like atmosphere in the given space at the Graduation Show. Audiences were welcomed to interact with any dress suspended from the ceiling as if they were playing with paper dolls. A computer was set up to play the recorded performance, *My Dress Hangs There* from the *Image Movement Sound Festival 2004*. One of the dress installations of the performance was shown as part of the show.

Despite the limited space, I was able to communicate with the viewers while they were taking photographs with my installations. The effect of nostalgia was most frequently mentioned among the viewers, and they seem to have enjoyed playing in my “playground”.

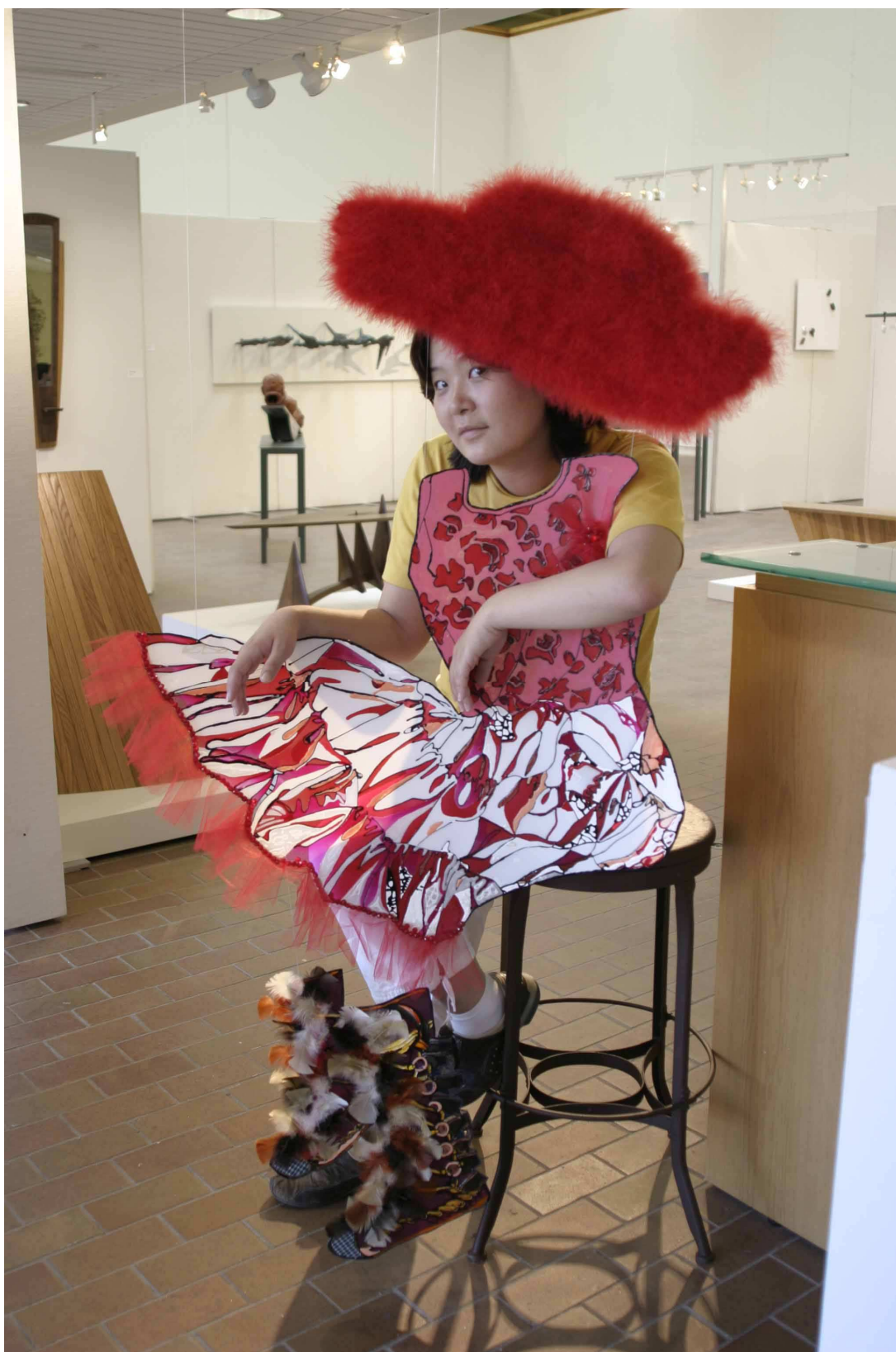


*Interaction with Audiences, 2004*





*Interaction, 2004*



*Interaction, 2004*



*My Dress Hangs There*, 2004, Mixed Media





*Introduction of the Show, 2004*

## **Conclusion**

People have their own ways of communicating with others. I learned how to communicate with others from different cultures when I was younger. It is my personal method to approach others by presenting and translating into my own language, the narratives: the image playing. Thus, I regard myself as an image collector who is eager to recollect residues of memories, which then transform into motifs for my dresses.

Through creating various styles of dresses and objects incorporated with paintings, I am able to learn about my conscious and unconscious world and about my basic instincts towards real life. The work is not only limited to the terms of human behavior, but it also expands to the physical surroundings and the relationships with other people, which indicate my past social status and my current social status. By collecting, cutting, drawing, and painting many images to shape an object, the layers of images animate the story and unveil the episodes of the life of fantasy.

I consider myself a complicated being, who experienced unstable stages of childhood that affected my nature. Life is full of surprises and unexpected events along with indescribable emotions. I feel that among the endless adventures are stories and the happenings of my inner and outer world. The viewers can either appreciate them or link to one of them through my artwork like playing with a paper doll and painting a coloring book. I want the viewers to imagine, think, and play with my art work with their own interpretations and methods. In that sense, I do not intend to be only an image collector but also a dream maker - a versatile communicator who creates stories with abundant spice for dream. I hope this will ultimately provide a way for me to observe the inner and the outer world with a better understanding without being didactic. This life-long project has just begun.





*The Quest of Childhood Memory*, 2004, Mixed media

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Museum of Art, 1998

## **Curriculum Vitae**

**So Yeon Yang**  
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### **Education**

- 2006     **MFA, Cranbrook Academy of Art**, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan  
            Fiber
- 2004     **MFA, Rochester Institute of Technology**, Rochester, New York  
            Fine Arts Studio-Painting (expecting to receive degree in 2009)
- 1999     **BFA, Hong Ik University**, Seoul, Korea  
            Painting

### **Group Exhibitions and Performances**

- 2008     “Wallpaper”, Group Show, **Teton Art Lab**, Jackson, Wyoming
- 2007     “Hot House”, Online Group Show
- 2006     Graduate Degree Show, **Cranbrook Art Museum**, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
- 2006     “Counter Cross”, Group Show, **Forum Gallery**, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
- 2006     “All About Me”, Group Show, **Open End Gallery**, Chicago, Illinois
- 2005     “Memorable History/Historic Memory”, **Forum Gallery**, Bloomfield Hills,  
            Michigan (Curator of the show)
- 2005     “All About Me”, Group Show, **Forum Gallery**, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
- 2005     “Sweet~Talk”, Group Show, **The Museum of New Art**, Pontiac, Michigan
- 2005     “Haderi Art Festival”, **Haderi**, Kangwon-Do, Korea
- 2005     “High in Fiber”, **Forum Gallery**, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
- 2004     “The Quest of Childhood Memory – MFA Show”, **Bevier Gallery**, Rochester,  
            New York
- 2004     “Image Movement Sound Festival 2004”- Collaborative Performance,  
            **Kilbourne Hall** and **Ingle Auditorium**, Rochester, New York
- 2003     “Wearable Art”, **Gallery R**, Rochester, New York
- 2003     “Gesture”, **Gallery R**, Rochester, New York
- 2002     “Quarter Mile Mural Project” at RIT (Creative Director) Rochester, New York

### **Work Experience**

- 2006 – Present     **Textile Designer** at Juven’s Inc. New York, New York
- 2004 - 2003     **Graduate Assistant** of Painting Department, RIT, New York
- 2004 - 2003     **Gallery Assistant**, Bevier Gallery, RIT, New York

2002 - 2001      **Freelance Designer**, Hallmark, Seoul, Korea  
2001 - 2000      **Make-up Illustrator & Make-up Designer**, Aekyung Ind. Co.,  
                         Ltd., Seoul, Korea  
2000 - 1999      **Merchandiser & Designer**, Hallmark, Seoul, Korea

### **Awards**

2004    Recipient of Image Movement Sound Festival 2004 Grant from RIT  
2004    Recipient of Institute Graduate Scholarship from RIT  
2003    Recipient of Institute Graduate Scholarship from RIT

### **Artist Residency**

2005    Haderi Artist Residency Program, Haderi, Kangwon-Do, Korea

### **Publications**

Simon, Nolan. "Questioning Identity", **metrotimes**, Detroit, Michigan, 10/12/2005  
[www.metrotimes.com](http://www.metrotimes.com)

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